Re/creating entrepreneurs of the self: Discourses of worker/employee 'value' and current vocational rehabilitation practices

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Abstract

The provision of vocational rehabilitation for people who are experiencing work disability is a social practice, but the social and political drivers and effects of this practice are rarely critically analysed in health research or policy. In this study, we used a Foucauldian theoretical perspective to analyse the ways in which current vocational rehabilitation practices in New Zealand re/produce notions of worker/employee 'value', and how different approaches to vocational rehabilitation deploy current discourses about 'value'. We also consider the subject positions produced through these different approaches, and the identities and actions they make possible for people experiencing work disability. The analysis showed that notions about the importance of worker/employee 'value' in a 'job market' are pervasive in vocational rehabilitation, and reflect wider societal discourses. However, the deployment of those discourses in different approaches to vocational rehabilitation practice are diverse, producing different opportunities and constraints for people experiencing disability. We argue that an examination of these various opportunities and constraints *at the level of practice approaches* is important, as considerable time and resources are allocated to developing solutions to help those who do not thrive in the current systems, yet we rarely critique the premises on which the systems are based.

Introduction

In the context of health care, 'vocational rehabilitation' refers to practices directed at enabling people who are experiencing disability to obtain and/or maintain work or employment. When and how vocational rehabilitation occurs, and the details of what it entails, are specific to the historical and cultural context in which it is situated. The practice of vocational rehabilitation has been incorporated into governmental agendas in westernised nations for nearly a century (Barton et al., 1930; Campbell, 1941; Obermann, 1980; Stiker, 1997). In recent times, it has often sat under the umbrella of health care because it is concerned with addressing or ameliorating the effects of injury, illness and disability. However, the overlaps and tensions with social security, welfare and disability rights bring into play a diverse range of interests concerning vocational rehabilitation's operation, how it is governed, and what the desired outcomes are (Armstrong, 2008; Duncan, 2004; O'Halloran, 2002).

Any disability-related rehabilitation practice interacts with notions of disability, and recent critiques from the field of critical disability studies pose some important challenges. Critical disability scholars argue that while the movement for the inclusion of disabled people in society (as is the aim of rehabilitation) has sought to embrace the 'social model' of disability (Oliver, 1986) and resist the portrayal of disability as a biological condition, this has cemented rather than subverted discourses of *disability* by continuing to set disabled people apart from others (Thomas & Corker, 2002; Tremain, 2001; Tremain, 2002). While one of the arguments underpinning the 'social model' of disability is that disability is produced in social structures and attitudes, separate from the structures and functions of the *body*

(referred to as ‘impairments’), the social model still reserves the term ‘disability’ for those with impairments, exclusive of many other types of people who are marginalised and disadvantaged in society. Therefore disability and impairment maintain a pivotal bond (Tremain, 2001). Whilst rehabilitation is set up as a service to enhance wellbeing and participation, because it is reserved for those with impairments it can be seen as subject to this critique – i.e. that it participates in the ‘othering’ of disabled people.

In relation to this context, practices of vocational rehabilitation are unable to be separated from the systems of thought that produce and structure them, and the social and political effects of those actions. Because of this, it is important to examine the historically and culturally situated ways of thinking, being and doing that make vocational rehabilitation intelligible and applicable in a particular society, and its social and political drivers and effects. Considering vocational rehabilitation from this wider perspective enables expanded discussions beyond just how we can do it better or more efficiently. It allows us to interrogate the overall practice — introducing an examination of why we do vocational rehabilitation at all, and hence the broader effects that any large-scale, policy-level changes might have.

In conducting the inquiry outlined in this article, we sought to interrogate the practices of vocational rehabilitation in New Zealand, with the purpose of examining its social construction and its effects. The analysis we present was specific to New Zealand, but part of the purpose is to discuss particular aspects of our findings in the context of theory and scholarship from other westernised countries, highlighting some trends associated with the current economic and political milieu. The focus of this

article is an examination of how different approaches to vocational rehabilitation render and deploy current discourses relating to 'value', and a consideration of the practices that are produced and their various effects.

Study design

The discussion and conclusions presented here derive from a doctoral study in which the lead author undertook a discursive analysis of vocational rehabilitation in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ), utilising the methodological the theoretical work of Michel Foucault. We present an overview of the design of the study here. Further detail about the application of Foucault's theory and methodology for this inquiry are available in an earlier published paper (Fadyl et al., 2013).

Theoretical perspective

The philosophical lens employed for this study was drawn from Foucault's work on discourse, subjectivity, power and government. In brief, the study was conducted from a postmodern perspective, and we used Foucault's notion of discourse as a tool to analyse vocational rehabilitation practices. Discourses were seen to both represent and re/produce what people experience as reality (Foucault, 1972), and anything that communicates statements (messages that can be understood by people) was viewed as a 'text' and could become a source for discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972). Some examples of texts were written documents, spoken words, images, objects such as tools or furniture, and arrangement of spaces such as building design or the layout of a room. Texts provided instances of discourse which also refer to larger practices, actions, structures, social conditions, or other products of discourse (often referred to as extra-discursive (Hook, 2001)). This enabled the authors to consider how discourse produces and is produced in power relations, and how subject positions

such as identities, roles and selves were constructed and acted upon (Fadyl et al., 2013; Graham, 2011; Hook, 2001).

Selection and accessing of texts for analysis

The texts analysed for the larger doctoral study (Fadyl, 2013) included both historical and current texts associated with the social practice of vocational rehabilitation in NZ. The discussion here is drawn from analysis of the subset of texts relating to current practices. For this part of the study, the texts accessed for analysis depicted or justified current vocational rehabilitation policy and practices. These included websites, brochures, programme sites and images, programme descriptions, a blog, policy documents, business planning and funding proposals, and were gathered via news media, reports, policy updates and academic papers; attending conferences and reviewing conference materials; and searching for and visiting existing and emerging vocational rehabilitation practices and services. This yielded a large number of texts for a broad discourse analysis, which was also supplemented by a more detailed analysis of a small number of current practices. Those selected for the detailed analysis were the practices where one or more aspects of the approach to vocational rehabilitation were markedly different to the majority of practices – but were still viable. This strategy enabled exploration of what vocational rehabilitation currently constitutes by examining the margins of legitimate and acceptable practices within this field.

Analysis of texts

The lead author conducted the analysis, in discussion with co-authors. Initially, texts were read for an overview to get a feel for the topic matter; then on a second read, JF conducted a more detailed analysis to identify the elements of discourse (see Foucault, 1972) that played particularly central roles in the way statements were made

and arguments were put together. The various texts relating to a series of events or specific idea were not treated as individual entities, but as a collection, and analysis often moved from text to text, following a particular thread. Foucault's methodological principles as outlined in his lecture *The Order of Discourse* (Foucault, 1981) were used to help orientate the analyst to the discourses visible in the texts and their products, and Foucauldian theory and scholarship – particularly work relating to 'governmentality' (especially (Burchell et al., 1991; Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999)) were used to interpret findings. A more detailed account of this process is given in a separate paper (Fadyl et al., 2013). The discussion presented here is an aspect of analysis that was particularly pertinent in considering the variation in current approaches to vocational rehabilitation practices — focusing on discourses of worker/employee 'value' and how they are reproduced within vocational rehabilitation theory and practice. We have not defined 'value' as the analysis explores constructions of 'value' and their various effects.

Discourses of worker/employee 'value' in vocational rehabilitation

The discursive construction of worker/employee 'value' in the texts analysed showed several inter-related aspects. Firstly, notions of what 'work' in current society is and means informed what being employed or not being employed implied. The idea that an individual's worker 'value' is demonstrated by their occupying a place in an employment 'market' was depicted as both an opportunity to find or create 'value' through niche openings, and problematic because of the pervasive notion that 'value' as a worker is reduced by disability, making employers less likely to perceive a disabled person as a valuable worker. This conception of worker 'value' being not static, but constantly negotiated in relationship to an ever-changing 'market' is closely

related to Foucault's discussion of 'human capital' during his lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Thus, in the analysis we look at the notion of 'employability' as depicted in NZ texts relating to vocational rehabilitation in light of Foucault's discussion of the neo-liberal conception of 'human capital'. Another aspect in the construction of worker 'value' in the context of vocational rehabilitation texts is that an individual's work involves a complex interaction with the development of their worker 'self' and the contribution of this 'self' to work and society. This is also closely linked to the notion of 'human capital', and broadens out the concept of worker 'value' to include who the person is and what they have experienced as well as what they can do. The broad aspects introduced here each contribute to the current scope of vocational rehabilitation practices—both in terms of what vocational rehabilitation consists of and what it aims to achieve. Below we discuss each of these aspects in detail, drawing on examples from the analysed texts, and then bringing them together to look at how they translate into vocational rehabilitation purposes and practices.

Employment as a demonstration of 'value'

In the wide range of texts analysed relating to current vocational rehabilitation practices, paid work was not depicted as necessarily a particular set of activities, but could be anything that is considered valuable in the context of an employment 'market', which is perceived as a complex and ever-changing system (Labour and Immigration Research Centre, 2012). Since this understanding of work positions the employment market as a key site for determining the 'value' of a worker or employee, there is an implication that if a person is employed, it is a demonstration that their skills and qualities have been judged as valuable.

Discourses that employment demonstrates or enhances a person's worth appear in various ways in vocational rehabilitation texts: In arguments promoting the employment of disabled people, it is sometimes suggested that through paid work, a person is given the opportunity to enhance their potential (which also communicates a statement that an unemployed person is *not* realising their potential). This notion is sometimes enlisted in the promotion of employment and rehabilitation services. For example, a supported employment service Elevator appeals to employers to offer paid work to disabled individuals, emphasising that "in doing so, you'll be giving more people with disabilities the opportunity to live up to their true potential" (Elevator, 2012). Furthermore, it is the '*value'* of disabled people as employees that is commonly the focus in arguing for employers to hire people who experience disability. One example is the assertion that it makes "good business sense" for employers to employ disabled people due to high levels of motivation, problem solving experience, and potentially increased market share through better understanding of disabled people's needs (Gor, 2007; New Zealand Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Trust, 2012). It is also not unusual to see statements expressing a vision of disabled people having equal 'value' to non-disabled people as employees, such as expressed by the national government-funded Workbridge employment support agency on their website as "every person with a disability has the same value as any other person and will contribute positively in the workplace" (Workbridge, 2012), again indicating that 'value' in this context is an important component of employment potential.

However, the tone of many of the texts promoting employment of disabled people also indicated that disability itself is seen as a factor that lowers disabled people's perceived 'value' as workers, such as reports that conclude that because of this sort of perception, "at every level of qualification, disabled people are less likely than non-disabled people to be in the workforce" (Human Rights Commission, 2011). Thus, discourses showing employment as a demonstration of 'value' both reinforce the discourse that *ability* to work is not the main issue (although beliefs about ability may be tied up in the assessment of 'value'), and stipulates an important task of vocational rehabilitation to be addressing the problem of perceived 'value' – lack of 'value' being a significant factor in the unemployment of disabled people. The notion that an individual's particular skills, attributes, qualities and characteristics constitute 'value' that is traded in a job market, and also that this 'value' is what makes a person employable, are important ideas in current vocational rehabilitation discourses.

Notions of worker/employee 'value' in neo-liberal society

Human capital: the neo-liberal worker

Discourses of work ascribing 'value' to the person fit with Foucault's description of 'neoliberal' discourse, which he discussed in depth during his 1979 public lecture series at the Collège de France (see Senellarat, 2008). Foucault (2008a) suggests that one of the elements that distinguishes neo-liberal economic thought from earlier liberal economic thought, is the view of a person's worth or 'human capital' as abstract and complex, as opposed to more fixed and represented as specific skills and hours of labour. In neo-liberal thought, the potential worker is not just a partner in a simple exchange of labour for wage as in earlier liberalism. Rather, the worker is engaged in a more involved enterprise – producing in themselves 'human capital' that they can trade on the labour market. In this conception of economic life, the

traditional capitalist ‘producer' of goods and services is not the only creator of value. The potential worker is perpetually fashioning ‘human capital' in the form of innate and acquired skills and qualities to trade in an employment market.

A person's ‘value’ in the labour market determines their potential earnings, and as such, they must be engaged in the enterprise of producing and reproducing that ‘value’ (Foucault, 2008a). This discourse is reinforced in current structures of organisations – with ‘human resources' having become both a department in large organisations and an occupation with qualifications and a career pathway (for example see Human Resources Institute of New Zealand, 2012a). In this, the job of human resources departments and professionals is to facilitate the movement of people from job to job and promote training and development. Deleuze (1992) also noted this trend – arguing that perpetual training has largely replaced trade training now that wages are often considered to be paid on the basis of ‘merit' as opposed to an exchange for time and labour.

Employability

In the same way that ‘human capital' has made it possible to think of the employment market as a site where differential human ‘value’ is demonstrated, ‘employability' in the sense of constant re/qualification and readiness to take up new employment opportunities has become an important domain that reinforces the idea that having work demonstrates a person's value in an employment market (Leggatt-Cook, 2007; Lunt, 2006; Rose, 1999). Employability is constructed as a quality that each worker is constantly establishing and re-establishing through skills, knowledge and other marketable aspects of their worker-selves, and as something that can be seen to

provide a more secure economic outlook for individuals in times of increasingly flexible and diverse work arrangements (Kamoche et al., 2011; Leggatt-Cook, 2007).

With this notion of employability being increasingly inscribed into public policy (Lunt, 2006), ensuring individuals are ‘employable' has also started to appear as a key task of vocational rehabilitation. An illustration of this is a vast increase in availability and use of work capacity tests in the last twenty years for various situations and conditions; and an increasing acceptance that it can be determined that rehabilitation is completed, not when a person necessarily has a job, but when they are able to work – a job being only one type of evidence that this is the case (Fadyl et al., 2010). One example which is prominent in the current Aotearoa New Zealand context is a controversial use of assessments for ‘vocational independence' as an alternative to actual employment to determine a person's eligibility for wage compensation by the New Zealand Accident Compensation Corporation (Armstrong & Laurs, 2007). In some current vocational rehabilitation practices, the focus is on empowering the person themselves to identify what they really want to do for work, and therefore what they need to do to make themselves employable, thus giving people skills that are not just for the immediate job, but that they may well use again along their career path.

Production and expression of self in work

As well as affecting a person's sense of being valued, being out of work is also seen as a risk to a person's ability to live a full life and develop themselves. The quote below, from a vocational rehabilitation and career guidance service, illustrates this view of work.

> *Career is defined as a significant journey of one's life and a concept that helps people plan and structure their lives … Work and life are integrated, with work being part of living (Robson, 2011 p.1).*

In the current employment context as described above, finding work is about determining how a person's skills, qualities and characteristics can be offered in a way that is considered valuable in the market. However, this combination of elements not only constitutes 'value' in an employment market, it also contributes to how people's subjectivities are constructed and how they understand themselves. While the majority of vocational rehabilitation services concentrate on ensuring establishment or retention of specific abilities and skills as qualifications for paid work, recently, vocational rehabilitation practices (such as the service quoted above) also give attention to notions of contributing one's *self* through work – in terms of a unique set of qualities, attitudes, values and experiences that make up a person. In this context, work is often defined more broadly to incorporate various activities that are considered 'valuable' in addition to paid work.

> *All of us have talents and skills to contribute – we are put on this earth to make a contribution. … Work doesn't mean just paid employment, it's anything you do that is of value to your school, clubs and communities (Peter O'Flaherty, quoted in Verkaaik, 2009 p.132).*

A key aspect in discourses of production and trade of 'human capital', as discussed earlier, is that the continual development of an employable self is a constant task that a person is engaged in as they live life. In current vocational discourses, the idea of

‘career' incorporates who the person is as well as the jobs they do, and a ‘career' is as much about fashioning a good narrative telling how the various elements fit together as it is about following a defined pathway. The Careers New Zealand website, which provides information about different careers and developing a career path for people living in NZ, describes a career as something which is integrated with life and who a person is:

> *Finding a career that is right for you is just part of achieving the life you want to lead. Career plans change along with your life priorities, and you'll move back and forth between the three stages of career planning (Careers NZ / Mana Rapuara Aotearoa, 2012a).*

The New Zealand Careers website advice is that “many of the skills employers look for in a candidate are transferable skills" and that “you can pick up skills from many places – not just from jobs you may have had" (Careers NZ / Mana Rapuara Aotearoa, 2012b). Seemingly unrelated jobs are linked through transferrable skills; travel and child rearing are experiences that can be valuable in the workplace. A person is expected to be constantly re-fashioning their working self so as to avoid becoming stale – through job changes, education, sabbatical, secondment (Careers NZ / Mana Rapuara Aotearoa, 2012a; Human Resources Institute of New Zealand, 2012b). It would not be considered strange if the factor that secured a person a competitive job was something different and unique in their career history. Thus we are all, as Foucault (2008a) put it, ‘entrepreneurs of ourselves'. Once again, this has implications for the task of vocational rehabilitation – the re-definition and re-fashioning of an ‘employable self' becoming a key opportunity.

In relation to vocational rehabilitation, increasingly in New Zealand, vocational rehabilitation practitioners are expected to be associated with an established career development body (Accident Compensation Corporation, 2012; Career Development Association of New Zealand, 2012), and career development is seen as central to a person's vocational choices, if not always the focus of vocational rehabilitation practices. In terms of career development texts, there is a growing body of 'career development' information that is available – much of this adopting discourses showing work and self as entwined, and the 'value' of an employee as partly determined by the 'self' that employee brings to the job.

Work and the production and contribution of self

Work and careers are depicted in terms of *contributing* one's self, and in addition to this, work plays a role in the discourse on the *production* of self. Because of this, there is an almost circular relationship in the production of self through work, and contribution of that self, also through work. On one hand, work is an avenue towards the ongoing creation of self – perhaps one of the most influential, as sociological literature discusses how our identities are tied into both our occupations and the ways in which we spend our income – disposable income with which to consume and define our selves being one of the aims of a good job (Grint, 2005; Solomon, 2008). On the other, work is seen as a contribution to society, but in many jobs the contribution is not only one of time or labour, or even a particular skill-set (although these things are important), but also a person's unique set of knowledge and characteristics. A person brings to a job perspective, outlook, experiences, skills, tendencies, and so on. For example, a report of a qualitative study of employers in the Auckland region of New Zealand stated that "some employers regarded these basic

skills and attitudes [personal characteristics] as more important for making a decision about whether to hire someone than technical skills and formal training" (Leggatt-Cook, 2007 p.26). Workers contribute their selves in addition to their time, labour and job-specific skills. Depending on the job, the contribution of self may be primary or secondary, but most jobs contain an aspect of this. Even for jobs that do not seek creative input from the person doing it, there is often an element of 'recruitment of selves' in the sense of seeking people whose personality and approach best fits the environment or the team, or indicates they may be molded appropriately. One example of this is a recruitment company based in Auckland that advertises its services as including administration of a questionnaire called the "Craft Personality Questionnaire" with its candidates, which identifies "eight basic personality traits proven to predict job performance and retention" (Frog Recruitment, 2012).

In the context of vocational rehabilitation, while disability can be seen as a risk to a person's collection of skills and abilities, the discourses linking work and self can also be interpreted as an opportunity for people whose skills or abilities are affected by disability, as the emphasis can be shifted to focus on personal characteristics and life experiences. Thus, in this sense, while disability carries a risk of unemployment that must be acknowledged, it can also be thought of as possibility for new opportunities for work – and this is where vocational rehabilitation can play a key role. This view of opportunity is the focus of some current practices – as discussed later in this article.

The notions that employment is a demonstration of 'value', and that a person not only contributes themselves to work, but is involved in self development through their work, contribute to constructing a need for vocational rehabilitation in current society.

However, the ways in which these discourses are reproduced in actual vocational rehabilitation practices are diverse. The remainder of the article is a discussion of the various ways in which these discourses of worker/employee 'value' appear in different approaches to vocational rehabilitation, and the different possibilities for action that these different approaches create.

The work of vocational rehabilitation: re/fashioning human capital

Foucault (2008a; 2008b) discussed the idea that within neo-liberal thought, following the idea of human capital, the whole of human life comes to be conceived of in terms of 'enterprise'. In other words, in personal and family life, leisure, work, health and many other spheres, individuals and groups make consumer-like choices and contract-like negotiations about how, where and by what means they live, what they believe, the services they see fit to partake of, and the ways and goals for which they contribute their own time and effort. Each person in a way is pursuing the enterprises that make them who they are and enable them to live their lives. As Rose (1999) articulates, one of the ways that this has played out in society is the 'marketisation' of aspects of life that were previously not considered in economic terms – such as health care and social services – with the expectation that choices made by human 'consumers' (along with the competitive character of tenders and contracts for 'services') function to regulate what is provided, how it is delivered and how much it costs.

> *Citizenship is no longer primarily realised in a relation with the State, or in a single 'public sphere', but in a variety of private, corporate and quasi-public practices from working to shopping. The citizen as consumer is to become an*

active agent in the regulation of professional expertise; the citizen as prudent is to become an active agent in the provision of security; the citizen as employee is to become an active agent in the regulation of industry and much more (Rose, 1999 p.166).

Rose discusses this marketisation in terms much more broad than work and rehabilitation, but this characteristically neo-liberal mode of operation is distinctly evident in vocational rehabilitation, which is positioned at an intersection of health care and social services. Current vocational rehabilitation resourcing in New Zealand and many other countries is largely governed through competitive tenders and contracts (for example see Accident Compensation Corporation, 2012), and subject to perpetual measurement of 'outcomes' such as return-to-work and training statistics, work capacity evaluations, as well as measures of cost effectiveness, which are seen to offer a picture of the value of services in terms of their contribution to the people who they work with (clients) and for (funders), and society at large.

Consistent with the neo-liberal discourses of employability and human capital discussed earlier, current conceptions of vocational rehabilitation tend to focus on the retention and / or re-creation of human capital. The aim of vocational rehabilitation in a broad sense is to ensure that individuals overcome work disability to the extent that they are at least employable, and ideally have enough 'value' on the labour market to earn a good wage. While this broad aim is fairly consistent across different vocational rehabilitation practices, the ways in which it is translated into methods can be quite diverse. Many practices focus on specific 'barriers' to employment, some on

career definition and development. The next section will look at some key differences in how practices deploy the notions of 'value' discussed.

Approaches to vocational rehabilitation

While there are many approaches to vocational rehabilitation in terms of the activities that are undertaken, the people who are involved and the detailed goals that are being pursued, one of the things this analysis made visible was that approaches to vocational rehabilitation could be categorised according to the ways in which discourses of worker/employee 'value' (intertwined in discourses relating to neoliberal economics) are taken up and played out in theory and practice. We identified three categories of approaches to vocational rehabilitation that, while they do not form an exhaustive list of approaches, serve to illustrate the different ways in which discourses of worker/employee 'value' are re/produced in current vocational rehabilitation. It should be noted that all the approaches discussed here aim to access mainstream employment (as opposed to positions specifically reserved for disabled people). This reflects discourses of diversity and equality that are currently dominant in rehabilitation and disability policy and services (for further discussion of these discourses and their effects in the wider context of vocational rehabilitation see Fadyl, 2013).

Retaining 'value': Identifying and addressing 'barriers to work'

A very common approach, and probably the most well-known of those we will discuss, is to view vocational rehabilitation as being largely about identifying what is preventing an individual being able to work and, once identified, addressing this through interventions such as adaptation of the workplace and/or the job, employer

and employee education, strategy use, and rehabilitation. Depending on the individual and the vocational rehabilitation services they connect with, the assessment of work dis/ability may focus on physical function, cognitive skills, social functioning and/or the interaction of these with the work environment. It may also involve assessment of issues considered to affect work functioning but that are not to do with the job – for example family responsibilities, emotional wellbeing. The aim of intervention is to minimise or eliminate the 'barriers' that are preventing the individual being able to perform a specified job (or in other words are hindering their 'value' as an employee). Often the job that is the objective – that therefore forms the context of assessment and intervention – is one that the individual already holds. If not, it may be a job role in a field they are experienced in, or something they have been assessed as having suitable skills and abilities to do based on current abilities and past experience.

Services typically include things like work site assessment, where a professional assesses the match between a person's current ability and the job they are required to do (e.g. see Bootes & Chapparo, 2002; McFadden et al., 2010); functional capacity evaluation, where a person's ability on a range of work tasks is assessed (see Jones & Kumar, 2003; McFadden et al., 2010); and rehabilitation to improve functioning in specific tasks and implement adaptive equipment and strategies. Services tend to be evaluated according to how efficiently they are able to help the person overcome these barriers, and there is an increasing range of tools for measuring 'outcomes' such as work-ability and return to work (Fadyl et al., 2010; Wasiak et al., 2007). This notion of identifying influencing factors and evaluating the efficiency in which they are addressed is also reflected in statements like the mission statement given on the

website for APM Workcare, a ‘supplier' of vocational rehabilitation services in New Zealand: “Our priority is to *contain the human and financial cost of a disability, injury or illness* and advance the quality of working life" (APM Workcare, 2012 emphasis added). The implication here is that disability is thought of in terms of the various costs it carries (individual and societal), and that minimising these costs – and therefore working to *retain ‘value’* – is a primary focus of vocational rehabilitation.

It could be argued that one of the reasons the ‘addressing barriers’ approach is so common is because of its focus on *retaining* a person’s current worker/employee value. From an efficiency point of view, it may make more sense to restore something than it does to start again. Furthermore, for a large proportion of people, returning to work quickly to the same job or similar would cause the least disruption in their lives. However, the limits of this logic are very quickly reached when we consider the situation for people for whom the ‘barriers’ cannot be easily overcome – such as people with significant changes in abilities, or people for whom the work situation was precarious to begin with (e.g. see Fadyl & McPherson, 2010; Levack et al., 2004; Ottomanelli & Lind, 2009; van Velzen et al., 2009). Indeed, it is these populations that are the focus of much research and specialised interventions (Young et al., 2005). An approach focused on retaining value by emphasising the restoration of previous abilities and roles positions those for whom this not possible or very difficult as lacking that value. Considering dominant discourses about the production of self through work roles (as discussed above), this is likely to create a threat to self-identity or self-worth, and it would stand to reason that this might become a new ‘barrier’ for future employment. In addition to this, if funding systems are designed around rewarding the cheapest and most efficient providers of services, these people might

become unprofitable and therefore unattractive clients, potentially encountering more 'barriers' when it comes to accessing vocational rehabilitation services. Whilst the advantages of this approach for a large proportion of people are important in considering its use, it is also important to consider the more marginalising effects it produces, especially since it is the group of people who don't achieve good 'return to work outcomes' that have become the focus of so much investment in research and intervention.

Investing to create 'value': Supported employment

As for the approach discussed above, supported employment models vary somewhat depending on the population that the services is aimed at, but generally what distinguishes this approach is the primacy of on-the-job learning and support. In a general sense, supported employment models work from the notion that getting an individual into a work environment and role quickly is key to empowerment and success (Bennie, 1996; The Association for Supported Employment in New Zealand, 2011a). Within this approach, an individual is not expected to be 'work ready' – meaning able to do the job – at the time they start employment. Balancing an employer's needs for a job to be done and the employee's need for learning, experience, and adaptation and strategy use is achieved by use of a 'job coach' or other support person. The job coach or support person's role is to enable the disabled employee to achieve job tasks and productivity with support. That support enables them to develop their skills and strategies, over time being able to work towards reducing the support required. It is not a requirement within this model for the support to be eliminated within a particular timeframe, and it is expected that for some disabled employees, the support may be ongoing, although not as intensive as it was initially. The aim is to enable people who experience significant disability to

have access to mainstream jobs within mainstream workplaces – rather than being limited to segregated jobs and workplaces (as for sheltered employment) or unemployment, both of which are associated with minimal income and limited opportunities for social engagement. Within this model, 'value' is often discussed in reference to an investment: putting resource into creating an individual who is able to be a productive worker from someone who previously was not contributing in this way. The quote below is an example of this.

> *Supported Employment refers to a process in which people traditionally denied career opportunities due to the severity of their disability are hired in jobs and provided long term, ongoing support for as long [as] is needed. It involves individual career planning, employer labour job analyses and the creative matching of a person to a work setting, culture and task. This approach assumes that each person, no matter what disability that he or she has, is employable [and] that each person can bring a return on an investment to an employer when given the proper support for as long as is necessary (Dileo and Langton 1993:3, cited in The Association for Supported Employment in New Zealand, 2011b).*

The idea of supported employment as an 'investment' – of it being a process of moving a person from a state of being unable to work to being a productive worker who is valuable to an employer – has a number of flow-on effects in how it positions the individual worker. From one perspective, it offers a person who has been unable to demonstrate their 'value' as a worker the opportunity to be seen as acquiring that 'value'. However, this also creates a situation in which the person is seen as of lesser 'value' (and higher cost) as a worker than the people around them because they need

this ‘investment’ to be able to obtain and maintain the job. This in turn positions them as ‘other’ in the workplace. Thus, while one of the goals of supported employment is to open up work opportunities and thus lessen the social exclusion that disabled people experience, the effects of this ‘othering’ within the workplace also need to be considered in the analysis of the benefits of this practice.

Re-envisaging ‘value’ and identifying and/or creating employment niches

The third approach identified through discourse analysis is one in which the focus is on identifying ‘value’ in the experience of disability or the functions of the disabled body or mind, and then identifying the employment opportunities associated with this ‘value’. Most often, the journey of vocational rehabilitation within this approach is not focused on rehabilitating the disabled body or mind to fit within a previous job role or a close approximation, but on re-envisaging the experience of disablement as a shift in the ‘value’ that is offered in an employment market. Old skills and abilities may be left behind, but new ones and the ‘value’ they offer are identified. A process of ‘empowerment’ takes place and the role of the vocational rehabilitation practitioner is to partner with or figuratively stand behind the disabled individual to help them re-envisage and re-create their worker selves (Work for all (Kaleidoscope), 2010). A key aim is not to see the disabled individual as diminished in their function or abilities, but enhanced in different ways – offering value in a way that may be unique. A doctor who has had a spinal cord injury might become better able to understand the experiences of hospitalisation and rehabilitation, of learning new ways to function – enhancing both empathy and knowledge of health care systems for her patients. An amputee who was a public works labourer and had a passion for rock climbing, may find a new vocation in setting up a hoist system to enable him to reach parts of buildings that are difficult to access, and being mentored to start a painting business.

The example quoted below comes from a manual published by the New Zealand Spinal Trust for people learning to live with a spinal cord injury.

> *So many people talk about disability as a hindrance to working. I have found the opposite. Going to hell and back helped me to understand other people's pain and has meant that in my chosen profession of Psychology I can connect with people in ways I never dreamed (Lea Galvin, quoted in Verkaaik, 2009 p.130).*

Whilst all the approaches to vocational rehabilitation described in this article draw on neo-liberal discourses that produce what Foucault refers to as the 'entrepreneur of the self', it is this approach – emphasising a re-thinking of value – that most strongly resembles the image of the 'entrepreneur' in the traditional capitalist sense. The approaches described above have focused on a restoration of previous skills and abilities or an 'investment' in developing 'value', but the approach described here assumes that 'value' is not strictly defined, and that it can be discovered or created. This presents an opportunity for the process of vocational rehabilitation to be about redefining the 'market' as opposed to simply shaping people to fit it. However, the way in which it has been structured also brings with it a heavy burden of responsibility. The focus on empowerment ultimately puts the responsibility on the individual who is experiencing disability to 'lead' the re-envisioning of their worker selves. Many may welcome this, but it could also exclude certain people – for example people who experience difficulties with abstract thinking, planning or problem-solving. The work involved in defining one's 'value' and finding that niche market is also time-consuming, and aside from the resource allocation discussions

that would inevitably arise in the current economic context, it would have to be judged as worth pursuing to the individual if they were to engage in this process.

Discussion

An article by Edwards and Imrie published a decade ago (Edwards & Imrie, 2003) argued that the social inequities experienced by disabled people are produced by the 'valuations' that systems of signification and representation within society attribute to the corporeal forms of the disabled body. They showed how Bourdieu's discussion of 'social capital' and habitus could be used to analyse the negative experiences that disabled people described in relation to trying to obtain and maintain employment. In particular, that quite apart from the person's actual ability to do the job, the disabled body displays ways of talking and acting that deviate from the usual embodied forms, evoking (often unconscious) social attitudes that disadvantage a person in an employment situation (Edwards & Imrie, 2003).

Our study – applying Foucauldian scholarship to examine the ways in which discourses of worker/employee 'value' are deployed in practices of vocational rehabilitation – extends and adds complexity to this aspect of Edwards and Imrie's work. In addition to highlighting how current discourses of work and employment construct the need for vocational rehabilitation and shape the forms that it takes, we show how this notion of worker/employee value can produce both constraints and opportunities in a rehabilitation context. Although the notion of impairment and disability as an impediment to employment certainly still dominates, there are other constructions of disability that are gaining some ground in vocational rehabilitation. In particular, we can see an emergence of vocational rehabilitation approaches that re-

envisage the experience of disability or impairment and/or the 'different' body or mind as something that can be valuable in a potential worker/employee.

Our analysis shows that whilst discourses of worker/employee 'value' are entwined in pervasive and seemingly inexorable societal discourses associated with neo-liberalism, the deployment of those discourses in practices of vocational rehabilitation can be diverse and have a range of effects in terms of the opportunities and constraints they produce for disabled people. From a policy perspective, it is important to acknowledge both the underlying discourses and the different manifestations of discourses in practice, as recognition of what is *possible within current discourses* can be a crucial step towards questioning the effects of dominant practices and becoming aware of alternatives.

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